

CHATTEL SLAVERY IN THE MEADOWLANDS

“The axe forgets but the tree remembers.” - African Proverb

The earliest documentation of enslaved people in New Jersey dates to 1664 when England established a proprietary government in the state, including in southern Bergen County and the Meadowlands. The Dutch also likely had slaves in their settlements along the Hudson River when they had control of the colony. By 1745 according to the state census, enslaved people accounted for approximately 7.5 percent of New Jersey’s population.

The Meadowlands was known as New Barbados, named after the Caribbean island under England’s rule at the time. Enslaved people were transported to the Meadowlands from the Caribbean and Afrika. Pirates also brought kidnapped people to sell into bondage through the Meadowlands during the 1700s and were driven from the area by the Great Meadowlands Fire of 1791, which was intentionally set to oust them from the region.

The process of abolishing chattel slavery in New Jersey began with the Gradual Emancipation Act of 1804 that allowed children born after July 4th 1804 to enslaved mothers to be freed when they reached the age of 21 (females) and 25 (males). There were 16 enslaved persons in 1866 when the State amended its constitution, to abolish slavery.

* On this sign, we choose to spell Afrika in this way as most traditional or vernacular languages on the continent us “k”, and to recognize the unity and self-determination of Afrikan people and their descendants.